

## THE MONTANIAN

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**Several Libby bills moving through House****Legislative report by****Rep. Ralph Heinert, R-Libby**

The Easter break came with a flurry of bills being advanced in both the House and Senate.

I was able to convince the appropriations committee to un-table the grant request for ARD-Net and pass it out of their committee on March 24. It is a one-time grant for \$175,000 to extend the life of this program through the Lincoln County Health Department for an additional year. I presented it in the House again on the same day and it now awaits final reading before moving to the Senate. There are still a lot of hurdles for it given the state of the budget, but I am still hopeful. It will help keep this program going to assist some of the folks with asbestos-related problems until permanent funding can

**HEINERT**

be obtained from other sources.

House Bill 612 (I co-sponsored with Rick Maedje) was signed by Gov. Brian Schweitzer on Thursday [March 24] also. It

will allow certain state land timber sales of up to 200,000 board feet to be processed and permitted much quicker than in the past.

Other bills that are advancing allow for the use of interest from the Coal Tax Severance Fund to be used for economic development, resource and conservation projects and needed water projects for communities around the state. Included in them are two grant requests for the City of Libby that will assist in the expansion of the waste water

treatment system if they are approved. These are matching grants and Libby is fairly high on the priority lists. They provide for a good use of the coal severance interest and do not increase the tax burden on Montanans.

I have also met with Gov. Schweitzer and the state DEQ director again and will continue to have follow-ups with them whenever possible related to the Mines Management Project on upper Libby Creek. Mines Management officials continue to work with DEQ on the re-permitting and I hope to be able to meet jointly with them and DEQ again before the session ends. This project can have such a dynamic influence on the economies of Troy and Libby (the whole county and state for that matter) that we all need to do eve-

rything we can to make it happen. We need to keep the governor to his word to do everything in his power to make the project happen sooner rather than later. Individual letters to him from each of you can help keep the project uppermost in his mind and moving forward.

Also, I do appreciate the contact and comments that I have received from many of you stating your opinions even though we sometimes disagree on a particular topic. Your views are important to me. Thanks for taking an interest.

(Rep. Ralph Heinert can be contacted by writing to his attention: Capitol Building, PO Box 200400, Helena, MT 59620-0400, by e-mail: [rheinert@iclink.com](mailto:rheinert@iclink.com) or by telephone, 1-406-444-4800)